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## First Season's Accomplishments

Siegfried H. Horn  
*Andrews University*

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PHOTO. GEORGE J. UNGER

*Excavated early Christian church at Heshbon. The white area in the right background is the apse with a cistern built into it in Arabic times. In the center are three column bases separating the central aisle from the northern side aisle. In the foreground is an assortment of columns, bases, and other dressed stones from the church.*

Excavating Biblical Heshbon in 1968—5

# First Season's Accomplishments

By SIEGFRIED H. HORN

ONE of the questions most frequently asked me since my return from Heshbon has been "What did you find?" The questioner, of course, refers to "objects," even though he may not use the word. He probably expects to hear that valuable hoards of jewelry or coins have been unearthed, or that inscriptions or manuscripts rich in historical information have been discovered. If such are the questioner's expectations, he may be somewhat disappointed, since at most Near Eastern archeological sites, inscriptions are rarities and objects made of precious metals are seldom found.

However, the first season's excavations at Heshbon have produced a large number of interesting objects. We found some 80 coins, all but one of copper or bronze; the lone dissembler was of silver. The majority of coins come from the Arabic periods: Ommiad, Mameluke, Saladin, et cetera. Some came from the Phoenician coast, Judea, and Petra, while others are of Roman or Byzantine origin. A few poorly preserved ones possibly originated in the Seleucid period.

The debris of ancient Heshbon contained sling stones, the eloquent witnesses of warfare. It contained nails, needles, rings, bracelets, beads, pendants, pieces of decorated bone, ivory inlay from furniture, a spatula, a spoon, bells, chains, horseshoes, an iron helmet, a clay rattle (a hollow ball with pebbles in its center), and numerous other objects of utility of various kinds. (Because the wet soil of Palestine does not preserve organic material, clothing, wooden furniture, or any other objects of wood, cloth, or leather have not survived.)

We were happy with the fine yield of pottery from one of the cisterns. We recovered two unbroken painted vessels (retained by the Government of Jordan), and enough potsherds to reconstruct five vessels to a good degree of completeness. Since this cistern was discovered only a week before the excavations ended, we were unable to restore more pottery pieces from that cistern, but after the sherds arrive in America attempts will be made to restore more vessels. A rare painted Ommiad lamp in the shape of a tiny miniature pitcher belongs to the treasures of our pottery discoveries.

Then there are the multicolored fragments of mosaic floors found in the ruins of the ancient church of Heshbon. Their restoration and removal to Madaba were described last week. That they attracted the attention of all our visitors and that their

discovery was reported in newspapers of many countries can readily be understood.

But as welcome as all these objects were and as much as we treasure them, they are not the most important results of this summer's excavations. The more outstanding result of our work and the money of our sponsors is the reconstruction of the history of Heshbon.

In the second article of this series (January 9) the history of Heshbon according to literary sources (mainly the Bible and the works of Josephus) was recounted. From these sources it is known, first of all, that Heshbon was an important city in the time of Moses, in the middle of the second pre-Christian millennium, or, expressed in archeological terms, during the Late Bronze Age (= 1600-1200 B.C.). The city was at that time the capital of the Amorite Kingdom of Sihon, whom the Israelites defeated under Moses' leadership. However, before our excavations began, the mound showed no evidence that the city had been inhabited at that early time. Among the sherds strewn all over the mound scholars had picked up a few isolated Iron Age pieces, some Hellenistic sherds, and many Roman, Byzantine, and Arab specimens, but no Late Bronze Age piece of pottery. It is therefore a matter of great satisfaction to report that in our deep shaft of Area B a few Late Bronze Age sherds were unearthed, which prove that Heshbon was occupied during that time. It should be noted that the Late Bronze Age level had not previously been reached, hence the discovery of a few sherds of that period was a significant find.

#### Area-by-Area Results

In a more systematic way I shall now describe the results of our excavations area by area and state what we found in each of the areas in which our work was concentrated. We chose four areas, in each of which we had a specific aim. Area A on top of the mound (895 meters above sea level): to excavate whatever public building—temple or church—might have occupied the highest point of the ancient city. Three column bases were visible there before excavations began. They showed us that an important structure had been there in times past.

Area B on a ledge of the mound comparatively free of visible ruins: to sink a seven-by-seven-meter probe into the mound and proceed as quickly as possible to find out the number of levels of occupation.

Area C on the western slope of the mound: to locate the ancient city's fortification by sinking a series of

squares into the debris, starting at the lower crest of the mound and going up the slope.

Area D on the southern flank of the highest part of the mound, labeled by us "acropolis": to ascertain the nature of the structures at this place which showed signs of having been the access to the acropolis.

*Area A and Its Byzantine Church.* Already during the second week of excavations it became clear to us that the column bases in Area A belonged to a Christian church. A large multi-colored piece of a mosaic floor was uncovered and, surrounding it, several blocks of stone of a semicircular apse facing the east. Later another piece of mosaic floor was discovered in the central aisle of the church. We also uncovered three courses of stones of the north wall of the church. It consisted of fine masonry of headers and stretchers. It appeared that the church had consisted of a central aisle and side aisles, separated from the central aisle by rows of columns. The southern aisle and the western part of the church, where the entrance must have been, have not yet been uncovered. It is planned to excavate these parts in the 1970 season.

After the Arab conquest of Heshbon in the seventh century the church must have been completely destroyed. Whether this happened immediately after the city was taken by the Arabs or at some later time cannot be ascertained with the available evidence, but the rich remains of an early Arab occupation testify that this site became an important center of the Arab population. The church was razed almost to its floor level, and

the whole area was converted into an open space, which seems to have been paved (if one can trust the memory of the oldest villagers, who claim to have removed the pavement stones for reuse in the building of their houses when they were settled on the northeastern slope of the mound a few decades ago by a rich landowner of this area).



PHOTO: AVERY V. DICK

*The four Greek letters preserved on this plaster from the church probably are part of the name Daniel, thus [D]ANIE[L]. The name may have stood above his picture.*

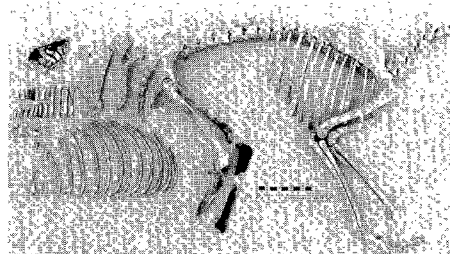


PHOTO: GEORGE J. UNGER

*Diggers uncovered this skeleton of a large cat, probably a lynx, with its head missing and its left hind leg burned to the bone.*



PHOTO: GEORGE J. UNGER

*Workers are moving a huge stone out of Area D on the southern slope. Behind the area supervisor (white shirt) are the remains of a vaulted room of the early Arabic period.*

Water channels had been laid all over the area to catch rain water and funnel it into cisterns. One cistern was constructed in the apse of the church; another lay between two column bases.

*Area D, Ascent to the Acropolis.* In this area we found, as expected, the ascent and entrance to the summit area of Heshbon, or, as we called it, the acropolis. We found that during the early Arab period the open space, described in the discussion of Area A, had been surrounded at least on three sides by buildings that consisted of stone-built rooms, some vaulted. Several phases of remodeling showed that these structures must have been used for a long time. A stairway, after the pattern of some stepped streets seen today in the Old City of Jerusalem, led to the acropolis along structures lying on both sides of the street and at different levels.

During the last two weeks of work the remains of the Arab structures were removed, and Byzantine and Roman building remains came to light. We discovered a beautiful stone pavement of tiles made of steatite stone. We will undertake the study and identification of these structural remains during the following season. Also parts of an earlier stairway leading to the summit of the mound were discovered. The stones were much better dressed than those of the overlying stairway.

In the lowest square of Area D (Square 3) several late pits were dug up. The construction activities carried out there in Arabic times had much disturbed the former buildings and their remains. In the Roman stratum of this square a well-articulated skeleton of a female adult was found without funerary equipment, indicating that it was not a normal burial. Half of the jaw and most of the teeth were missing, as well as the left arm and hand, and both legs from above the knee. In her chest was a calcified tumor the size and shape of an ostrich egg. This skeleton raises questions for which the archeologist can hardly be expected to provide satisfactory answers with the available evidence at hand: Was the woman a slave, whose body was discarded at her death without receiving a decent burial? Had she died as the result of the chest tumor? Why had her body been mutilated? Do we have here evidence of foul play, perhaps of a murder?

*Area C, the Site of a Thick Layer of Debris.* On the western slope of the mound we dug in four squares in order to find the city's wall, to which reference is made by inference in Song of Solomon 7:4, where a gate by the name of Bath-rabbim is men-

tioned. We found a thick layer of debris that had washed down the steep western slope of the mound during the several centuries that Heshbon has been a ruined site. It was only in the last week that we reached building remains of Roman times after having removed some 12 feet of debris. These remains need more study before anything about them can be said with certainty.

While Area C did not meet our expectations, inasmuch as we have not yet encountered the city wall, it has provided us with more objects than the other three areas together. Its debris was saturated with Arabic painted and glazed ware, Roman and Byzantine potsherds, and some earlier material. But the most exciting find was a cistern 15 feet deep in Square 4. Six men worked in that cistern for six days to clear it out, and their work produced, as has already been mentioned in an earlier article, 68 buckets of pottery. Among it were some complete vessels and enough sherds to reconstruct several others.

*The Deep Shaft of Area B.* The seven-by-seven-meter probe designed to inform us as to how many strata of occupation there were in the mound met all our expectations and, in addition, posed surprises. First, we encountered layers of Arab remains. After they were removed we met a thick level of almost sterile white-gray pulverized limestone. In the northern part of the square the remains of a collapsed installation were found, which seems to have been a lime kiln. They reached to a depth of about ten feet, and the burned stones of its wall and collapsed domed roof with the rubble between badly disfigured our north balk and made it dangerous to come near to it.

Near the south balk the thick white-gray layer ended at a wall, partly removed. Underneath the layer a stratum from Byzantine and Roman times was uncovered, and then a rebuilt phase of a three-and-one-half-foot-wide wall from Hellenistic times, to judge from the evidence provided by some Greek potsherds and a jar handle from the island of Rhodes with the name of a priest stamped on it during whose term of office the jar was made. This priest, Aratophanes, was in office between 220 and 180 B.C.

Underneath this wall was a neatly built wall of large field stones. Not far below its top was found a headless skeleton of a large cat, probably a lynx. One hind leg showed signs of burning. One wonders what had happened to this animal. Was it a sacrifice? If not, why was its head missing and one leg burned to the bone?

At the end of the season a depth

of 12 feet had been reached, but not yet the bottom of that wall. There were indications that this wall had been laid into a deep trench and that it was only the invisible foundation for a wall, now entirely gone, to prevent undermining of the wall by sappers. It seems that the wall, slightly curving, had been part of the defense system of the acropolis. The associated pottery is mainly Iron III (= 550-330 B.C.), with some sherds coming from the period of the Hebrew kings. It was from the lowest level of this probe that we obtained the few decorated Late Bronze Age potsherds that prove that the city existed in the time of Moses.

On August 28 an ostrakon came to light, a potsherd containing a poorly preserved Hebrew text written in ink. The script indicates that it was written after the Exile. The inscription consists of five broken lines of text, which seems to be a list of names. This most welcome and exciting discovery made in a country in which extremely few inscriptions so far have been found, is hopefully a harbinger of more inscriptional material to be discovered in future seasons.

#### Future Plans

Andrews University plans at least two more seasons of excavations. In Area A the remainder of the church needs to be excavated, and any monumental buildings of earlier periods underneath it. Also the Roman and pre-Roman structures in Area D must be uncovered. In Area C we want to reach bedrock in all squares opened so far and want to continue our work up the slope to reconstruct the history of residential Heshbon. The end result of this work in C should be a wide trench that reaches from the bottom of the mound to its summit along bedrock, somewhat similar to the wide trench that K. Kenyon dug at Jericho. The very interesting Area B will be enlarged and the excavation of the Iron Age wall continued. We hope to reach earlier levels during our next season. ♦♦

(Concluded)

## THE RECEIVING OF GIFTS

(Continued from page 3)

wisdom by the eloquence of silence, and attend to the work that is close at hand. I protest against the zeal that they manifest that is not according to knowledge, when they ventilate their ideas about foreign fields of labor.

Let the Lord work with the men who are on the ground, and let those who are not on the ground walk humbly with God, lest they get out of their